

# Spinach

## History

It is believed that spinach originated in the Middle East – most likely in what is present day Iran. Arab traders carried spinach to India and China. The first documented record of spinach use in China came around 650 AD. It later became a popular vegetable in the Arab Mediterranean of North Africa. It reached Europe in the 13th century when the Moors introduced spinach to Spain. Spinach popularity spread to the rest of Europe in large part due to its spring crop harvest time. Spinach was even mentioned in the first known English cookbook that was compiled in 1390.

Spinach traveled to the United States with European settlers in the 1700s. By 1806, spinach was a popular vegetable throughout the US. In the 1920s spinach was being pushed commercially, primarily by the Popeye the Sailor man cartoon. In fact, Popeye's catchphrase includes the line "I'm strong to the finish, 'cause I eat me spinach."

## Fun Facts

- Fresh spinach is available all year long from crops grown in California and Texas
- Spinach grows best in places with long, hot summers and cold winters
- After seeds are planted, spinach can be harvested 6-7 weeks later
- It is full of vitamins A, C, folate, B<sub>6</sub>, E, and K
- It is also a great source of magnesium, potassium, iron, and calcium
- Our bodies are unable to easily absorb the iron and calcium because of another compound in spinach: oxalic acid
- Try eating foods high in vitamin C, like oranges and bell peppers, to better absorb these important nutrients



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